

A SOCIO-ECONOMIC JUSTICE SNAPSHOT OF THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY I

INTRODUCTION

The Government of Zimbabwe this week launched the National Development Strategy I (NDSI) which will run from January 2021 to 2025 under the theme “Towards a Prosperous and Empowered Upper Middle-Income Society by 2030”. The 5-Year Medium Term Plan is designed to realise ‘Vision 2030’ with priority on economic growth and stability, food and nutrition stability, governance, human capital development, housing delivery, health and well-being, and devolution among other priorities.

THE POSITIVES

Overall, the NDSI is well crafted and commendable on a number of aspects that previous economic blueprints have failed to take into account, and it has all the potential to succeed if properly implemented. Firstly, the development strategy clearly articulates the implementation plan or matrix, emphasising on strong need for monitoring and evaluation of progress made. Strict adherence to the implementation plan is key to the achievement of the strategy and so is the inclusive participation of all stakeholders in the continuous monitoring of the strategy. Secondly, the commitment to have the strategy available in different Zimbabwean languages is a positive move to ensure inclusivity and this is a clear departure from the previous blueprints that were only available in English. Thirdly, the plan expressed plans to hold road shows countrywide to help launch the NDSI which will allow citizens to have an in-depth understanding of the strategy as well as add their voice on implementation modalities which will eventually promote collective efforts towards the realisation of Vision 2030.

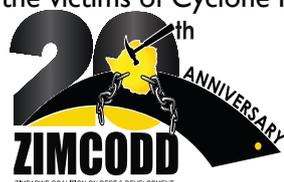
SHORTFALLS AND AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION

I. Food and Nutrition Security

Although the strategy outlines ambitious targets which are plausible, further analysis reveal that the targets (increasing food self-sufficiency from 45% to 100% and reduce food insecurity from 59% recorded in 2020 to less than 10% by 2025) might be overambitious and might therefore be unattainable. Most of the strategies to ensure food security are based on how to make the land productive or how to increase production instead of majoring on how to motivate and encourage farmers to be productive as they are the backbone of the agriculture sector. Again, the document overlooks the issue of natural occurrences like cyclones and how farmers would be compensated in the event of such natural disasters. The NDSI also does not have policies to protect farm workers and safeguarding their welfare.

II. Housing delivery

In line with the right to safe and affordable housing, the NDSI is targeting an accumulation of 220 000 housing units to be delivered as a function of effective demand over the 5-year period. The strategy however fails to mention and address the issue of illegal housing structures that has dominated the headlines over the past weeks. Recently, there have been situations where houses were being demolished in Harare and Chitungwiza, leaving hundreds of people homeless. What is disturbing is that most of these housing schemes that are deemed illegal in suburbs especially in Harare were acquired on political grounds, as a vote buying tool, and the politicians who would have allocated the stands will not stand with the poor citizens in the event of demolitions. On humanitarian grounds, these poses a few questions: If the government could not afford suitable accommodation for affected individuals how will it manage to provide accommodation for 220 000 households? What policies has the government put in place to protect individuals who will face the risk of getting their houses demolished? Further, the development strategy does not make a provision for households which are affected by natural disasters such as cyclones and earthquakes. Some of the victims of Cyclone Idai to date have no proper housing facilities.



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III. *Access to quality, equitable and inclusive education*

The Government acknowledges the challenges in accessing quality and inclusive education especially for the disenfranchised populations that are found in remote places and over-crowded urban areas. The NDS proposes to achieve the targets by implementing programs that increase capacitation of national strategic institutions and infrastructure development in schools. Achieving these targets requires huge budget allocations to the education sector and priority should therefore be given to infrastructure development and funding for the poor and vulnerable students.

IV. *Health and Well-being*

Health of citizens is central to economic development. The Zimbabwean health system has been facing serious challenges. The NDSI makes provision for enabling access to quality healthcare and improving the health infrastructure which is commendable. Strategies proposed to deal with challenges facing the health sector and improving access to health across the population are all high sounding but like any other past economic blue print, the challenge is on implementation. The NDS needs to put more emphasis on holding local authorities accountable and adequately resourcing local authorities to effectively discharge on their mandate for improved social wellbeing of communities.

V. *Devolution and Decentralisation*

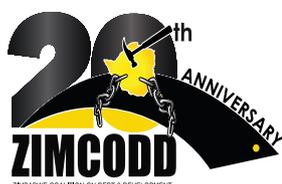
One of the core values of Vision 2030 is decentralisation which seeks to empower competent provincial councils and local authorities, thus giving community a chance to participate in local developmental issues. The challenges that currently bedevil decentralisation are likely to persist given that the NDSI fails to precisely deal with the perceived rift between local authorities, which are largely run by the opposition, and the central government. Government has viciously criticized local authorities in urban areas for poor service delivery, yet it is the duty of the central government to hold the local government accountable. Further, it is also important to note that effective decentralisation requires accountability of provincial and local authorities to the electorate, as well as delivering of efficient public services and these are issues that the plan has to be attendant to.

VI. *Cross cutting issues*

It is plausible that Government recognizes the role of youth and women when it comes to economic development. The NDSI's emphasis on inclusive and shared growth is well articulated, making provisions for youth and women empowerment and increased participation in the mainstream economy. Further, other issues to take note of in the NDSI include tax justice and debt. Government reemphasised the need to fund the national budget through domestic resource mobilisation especially through taxation. The unsustainable debt situation further places a heavy tax burden on taxpayers who are already struggling to make ends meet considering poor remuneration they receive and the prevailing high inflation environment which has weakened purchasing power.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The NDSI, like any other economic blueprints before, covers almost all aspects of socio-economic development, with a clear articulation of the strategies to be implemented in line with the set targets. The plan to align national budgets to the development strategy in terms of priorities is a great move towards making sure that targets are strictly pursued. However, the NDS sets high targets, most of which are over-ambitious, for example, the issues of unemployment benefits to all, national insurance for the vulnerable and job creation. Considering that previous economic blueprints had also set these types of targets which only ended on paper, there is nothing that convince citizens that this is going to work out. Guided by the NDSI, the 2021 Budget should focus on ensuring effective debt management systems, continue with fiscal consolidation, zero tolerance to overdrafts with the RBZ to reduce domestic debt and to continue negotiations with International Financial Institutions and avoid contracting new debt to repay old ones. Policy implementation remains a challenge in Zimbabwe and this time around the Government has to prove to citizens that it is committed and willing to implement economic policies in the best interest of the nation as a whole. Political will and good governance is key to successful implementation of policies.



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